

CONTACT:

WHAT IS THE LINK BETWEEN RECYCLING AND CLIMATE CHANGE?

Rising levels of gases in the Earth's atmosphere have the potential to cause changes in our climate. Some of these emission increases can be traced directly to solid waste. The manufacture, distribution, and use of products – as well as management of the resulting waste -- all result in emissions of greenhouse gases that affect the Earth's climate. Preventing waste and improving recycling are real ways to help address climate change.

Responsible waste reduction practices help us reduce greenhouse gases. So how does recycling that chocolate milk carton affect emissions? You may be surprised.

Energy consumption matters.

Recycling saves energy. Manufacturing goods from recycled materials typically requires less energy than producing goods from virgin materials. Waste prevention is even more effective. When people reuse things or when products are made with less material, less energy is needed to extract, transport, and process raw materials and to manufacture products. The payoff? When energy demand decreases, fewer fossil fuels are burned and less carbon dioxide is emitted to the atmosphere.

Putting incinerators and landfill on diets.

Recycling and waste prevention allow some materials to be diverted from incinerators and landfills, and thus reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the combustion of waste and decomposition.

Get those trees to work.

Trees absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it in wood in a process called “carbon sequestration.” Waste prevention and recycling of paper products allow more trees to remain standing in the forest, where they can continue to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

What Can I Do?

Every little bit helps! For example, by recycling all of its office paper waste for one year, an office building of 7,000 workers could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 570 metric tons of carbon equivalent (MTCE), when compared to land filling. This is the equivalent to taking about 370 cars off the road that year. If an average family of four were to recycle all of its mixed plastic waste, nearly 340 pounds of carbon equivalent emissions could be reduced each year.

APRIL ARTICLE

Practice the 3Rs of Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. Do your part to reduce waste by choosing reusable products instead of disposables. Buying products with minimal packaging (including the economy size when that makes sense for you) will help to reduce waste. And whenever you can, recycle paper, plastic, newspaper, glass and aluminum cans. If there isn't a recycling program at your workplace, school, or in your community, start one. By recycling half of your household waste, you can save 2,400 pounds of carbon dioxide annually.

Paper? Plastic? Nope – Reusable! Using your own cloth or nylon bag instead of plastic or paper bags reduces waste and requires no additional energy.

Garbage in, Garbage Out. Reduce household waste by purchasing products that have minimal packaging and reduce your trash by about ten percent. This one tip will help have 1,000 pounds of carbon dioxide per year.

Use Recycled Paper. Stock up on 100% post-consumer recycled paper for your home printer. Doing so will save five pounds of carbon dioxide per ream of paper.

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